

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 /073 W
-----025874 180719Z /20
R 171233Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4151
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 3332

BELGRADE ALSO FOR USDEL CSCE

E.O. 11652:HXGDS
TAGS: CSCE, CZ, SHUM
SUBJECT: CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND BELGRADE: AN INTERIM SUMMATION

1. SUMMARY: WE REVIEW CZECHOSLOVAK REACTION TO THE FIRST PART
OF BELGRADE AND THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THAT MEETING ON
HUMAN RIGHTS HERE. END SUMMARY.

2. CZECHOSLOVAKIA WENT TO BELGRADE HOPING THAT WESTERN FEARS FOR
DETENTE--CAREFULLY NURTURED BY WARSAW PACT SPOKESMEN IN
THE PRE-BELGRADE PERIOD--WOULD LEAD TO A BLAND AND PAINLESS
REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION. IT WAS POISED TO PLAY THE NUMBERS GAME
ON INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS -- TO PORTRAY PROGRESS WHERE LITTLE REALLY
EXISTED--AND TO SHOUT "INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS" IF
CRITICIZED FOR VIOLATIONS OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS. OFFICIALS AND
MEDIA WERE RESTRAINED IN THEIR ADVANCE TREATMENT OF BELGRADE,
PRESUMABLY ANTICIPATING PROBLEMS AND PREPARING FOR DAMAGE-
LIMITING EFFORTS.

3. WE SUSPECT THAT THE CZECH DEL WENT TO BELGRADE EXPECTING SOME
DIRECT CRITICISM FROM USDEL BUT WITH FAIR HOPES THAT OTHER
WESTERN DELEGATIONS WOULD PULL THEIR PUNCHES AND LEAVE USDEL
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LOOKING ISOLATED. WE BELIEVE CZECHDEL AND THE FOREIGN
MINISTRY WERE SHOCKED BOTH BY THE LEVEL OF DIRECT CRITICISM
UTTERED FROM THE START BY US DELEGATES AND BY THE SUPPORT FOR THIS
FRANK APPROACH SHOWN BY OTHER WESTERN DELEGATES. THE
CZECHDEL, OF COURSE, STARTED OFF THE SESSION WITH THE DISTINCT
DISADVANTAGE OF FOUR DISSIDENTS, INCLUDING THREE CHARTER 77
SIGNERS, BEING TRIED AND CONVICTED IN PRAGUE OCTOBER 17-18.

A MEMBER OF THE MFA STAFF BACKING UP THE CSCE TALKS HAS PRIVATELY CONFESSED TO US HIS CHAGRIN AT THIS CLUMSY TIMING, BUT INSISTS THE MFA HAD NO SAY IN IT.

4. IN REPLYING TO US CRITICISM, THE REGIME HAS BEEN GREATLY FRUSTRATED BY THE RESTRAINTS PLACED ON ITS PROPAGANDA MEDIA BY THEIR NEED TO BE IN HARMONY WITH THE RECENT IMPROVEMENT OF OVERALL US-SOVIET RELATIONS. CZECHDEL REPLIES TO USDEL CRITICISM AND ITS CRITICISM OF US SHORTCOMINGS HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN MEDIA HERE ONLY CURSORILY. THE PRESS HAS GENERALLY SUMMED UP EACH DAY'S EVENTS AT BELGRADE IN SIX COLUMN-INCHES OR LESS. IT WAS UNDOUBTDELY WITH RELIEF THAT THE CZECHOSLOVAK PROPAGANDA ORGANS FOUND THEMSELVES UNLEASHED TO ATTACK THE NETHERLANDS, WHOSE BELGRADE DELEGATE HAD JUST ROASTED CZECHOSLOVAKIA, FOR ALLEGED POLICE MISTREATMENT OF TWO SONS OF A CZECHOSLOVAK EMIGREE; IN THE DUTCH CASE NO RESTRAINT WAS PLACED ON THEIR USE OF VENOM (PRAGUE 3298).

5. WHILE UNABLE TO USE MEDIA AGAINST THE US AS IT MIGHT LIKE, THE REGIME DID DECIDE (POSSIBLY PROVOKED BY OCT 21 DEMARCH RE CONVICTION OF CHARTER SIGNERS) TO CALL THE AMBASSADOR TO THE MFA TO RECEIVE A FORMAL PROTEST ABOUT CRITICISM OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA BY US OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON AND BELGRADE. THE PROTEST, HOWEVER, HAS SO FAR NOT HAD ANY CONCRETE EFFECTS--OTHER THAN CONTINUING THE RATHER INTENSE EMBASSY/MFA DIALOGUE ON THE MEANING OF THE FINAL ACT--THE MFA HAS CONTINUED TO ARRANGE HIGH-LEVEL APPOINTMENTS FOR THE AMBASSADOR AND HAS CORDIALLY RECEIVED A VISITING DEPARTMENT CONFIDENTIAL

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OFFICER; NO HARASSMENT OF THE STAFF HAS BEEN NOTED. THIS IS IN CONTRAST TO THE TREATMENT OF THE DUTCH, WHOSE AMBASSADOR HAD LONG-SCHEDULED CALLS IN SLOVAKIA CANCELLED BY THE GOC AND HIS EMBASSY STAFF PLACED UNDER CLOSE SURVEILLANCE FOR SEVERAL DAYS. TWO INSTANCES THIS MONTH OF DEFAACEMENT OF A USIS SHOW WINDOW, WHILE UNUSUAL, CANNOT BE UNEQUIVOCALLY LINKED TO EVENTS IN BELGRADE.

6. THE EFFECTS OF BELGRADE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA CANNOT YET BE GAUGED. THE MOST IMMEDIATELY ENCOURAGING THING IS THAT THE AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT SO FAR REACTED TO CRITICISM AT BELGRADE BY INTENSIFYING HARASSMENT OF CHARTER 77 ADHERENTS. HARASSMENT CONTINUES, BUT IS MUCH BELOW THE LEVELS REACHED EARLIER THIS YEAR. FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE WE CAN EXPECT NO QUICK CHANGE OF REGIME ATTITUDES, BUT BELGRADE II WILL HAVE BEEN A SUCCESS FOR US AIMS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IF IT IS INSTRUMENTAL IN GETTING THE REGIME TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE US AND ITS ALLIES ARE SERIOUS IN INSISTING THAT HUMAN RIGHTS FACTORS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF FOREIGN POLICY. AT THIS POINT WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT MESSAGE HAS SUNK IN FIRMLY--IDEOLOGICAL RESISTANCE TO ACCEPTING IT IS VERY STRONG--BUT WE DO BELIEVE THAT BELGRADE II HAS ALREADY CAUSED SOME ELEMENTS WITHIN THIS REGIME TO START THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR CZECHOSLOVAK

RELATIONS WITH THE WEST OF A CONTINUED POLICY OF OVERT REPRESSION OF ALL FORMS OF DISSENT. (FORTUITOUSLY, THE US DECISION TO RETURN THE CROWN OF ST. STEPHEN TO HUNGARY CAME AT A TIME WHEN CZECHOSLOVAKIA WAS UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE IN BELGRADE AND SERVED TO UNDERLINE THE ADVANTAGES OF MAKING SOME CONCESSIONS TO US VIEWS ON CSCE-RELATED ISSUES). THAT THESE ELEMENTS WILL GAIN SUFFICIENT INFLUENCE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE TO CAUSE A BASIC POLICY CHANGE IS, WE FEAR, DOUBTFUL. BUT BELGRADE, THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW IN A FEW YEARS, AND CONTINUED QUIET INSISTENCE THAT OUR VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS BE HEARD MAY HAVE EVENTUAL POSITIVE EFFECTS.

7. WITH THE REVIEW OF BASKET III IMPLEMENTATION CONCLUDED, THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN USDEL AND CZECHDEL
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IS GREATLY REDUCED. CZECHDEL ENERGIES SHOULD NOW BE MAINLY ENGAGED IN PUSHING ITS OWN AND SOVIET NEW PROPOSALS. THE GOC PROPOSAL ON CONTROLLING COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS IN THEIR REPORTING ON SIGNATORY COUNTRIES WILL, OF COURSE, OFFER A RIPE FIELD FOR CONFRONTATION OF EASTERN AND WESTERN THEORIES ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TREATY COMPLIANCE, COLLECTIVE SECURITY, AGREEMENTS, REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 17-Nov-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PRAGUE03332
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DG ALTERED PER 77 PRAGUE 3471
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770427-0904
Format: TEL
From: PRAGUE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771147/aaaabnzy.tel
Line Count: 143
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: dc5ab117-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 548926
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND BELGRADE: AN INTERIM SUMMATION
TAGS: SHUM, CZ, CSCE
To: STATE BELGRADE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/dc5ab117-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009